CHARACTER MOTIVATION – Act 2 sc 1

Act 2 sc 1: Oberon (Joe Dixon), Helena (Caitlin Mottram) and Demetrius (Oscar Pearce) (2005 RSC production)

Often when the directors and actors begin working on a play together, they will go through a process of paraphrasing the text: the actors find a modern equivalent for Shakespeare's words. The actors use this process to help them understand everything they have to say. Often, they discover that Shakespeare can say things far more eloquently than they can!

EXPLORING MOTIVATION

In pairs, ask players to read through the edited scene (see next page). First of all ask them to read it back to back. Then as if they are having a whispered argument. Then, as if they are having a stand-up argument. Which felt more appropriate?

Players now work in groups of four, with two people playing Helena and two people playing Demetrius. Ask one set (one Helena and one Demetrius) to play the scene as written, while the other two players 'translate' the words into modern English. Play the scene through starting with the character speaking Shakespeare's text, followed by the character speaking the paraphrase.

For example:

Demetrius: I love thee not therefore pursue me not.

Demetrius: Look, I really hate you. I wish you'd just get lost.

Helena: Even for that do I love you the more.

Helena: Oh, I love it when you say nasty things to me. It just makes me love you even more!

Discuss with the students whether this highlighted any particular areas. For example, some of Helena's lines can become very explicitly desperate in this kind of exercise. How might this inform our sense of how to play her? What information does it give us about Demetrius?

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EXPLORING SHAKESPEARE:
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act 2 sc 1 - Edited scene

Demetrius I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

Helena You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant
Leave you your power to draw,
And I shall have no power to follow you.

Demetrius Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?
Or rather do I not in plainest truth
Tell you I do not nor I cannot love you.

Helena And even for that do I love you the more.

Demetrius Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

Helena And I am sick when I look not on you.

Demetrius I'll run from thee and hide m in the brakes,
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

Helena The wildest hath not such a heart as you.

Demetrius Let me go;
Or if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

Helena I'll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell
To die upon the hand I love so well.